

Brig Gen David A. Cotton, USAF, director of Command, Control, Communications, and Warfighting Integration, U.S. European Command, confers with participants in exercise Combined Endeavor 2009

U.S. Air Force (Joshua L. DeMott)



An *Intelligent* Theater

By JAMES G. STAVRIDIS

Operationally, the U.S. military is essentially organized geographically. The world is divided into six combatant commands with wide-ranging responsibility for Department of Defense (DOD) activity across a defined theater.

At U.S. European Command, for example, our area of focus is the 51 countries that make up the European continent, stretching from the Bay of Biscay in the Atlantic Ocean to the far Pacific shores of Russia. Our area runs from the Mediterranean to the North Pole, and includes Turkey, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Israel outside of Europe. It is an area with close to 800 million people, more than 10,000 nuclear weapons, and the most powerful collection of armed forces and the

highest gross domestic product among the half-dozen combatant commands.

We are, of course, enormous consumers of intelligence. Our dedicated intelligence apparatus runs above 1,800 people, all focused on our particular theater of operations. Yet I often ask myself the question, and no pun is intended: Is this the most intelligent way to organize ourselves in the area of intelligence?

I think we can save resources, operate more efficiently, and provide commanders at the theater level and below better intelligence by organizing ourselves better.

As we look into the next decade, expending the time and energy to rethink the shape of theater intelligence structures and organizations is an investment worth making. Balancing analytic agility needed to support

commanders against their demands to enable operational forces puts our defense intelligence enterprise on the horns of a dilemma: where and how should it create analytic agility and at the same time maintain functional alignment over the long haul?

The key is agility: we should apply some of the principles of special operations to our theater intelligence approach.

Is What We Have Still Relevant?

As we look at the intelligence structure of the Department of Defense after 9 years

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of war, preceded by an additional decade of intense operations approaching war (Somalia, Haiti, the Balkans, Operations *Northern Watch* and *Southern Watch* in Iraq, Colombia, and hostage rescue and disaster relief missions), it seems that we are finally coming to grips with the intelligence demands of high-fidelity, high-tempo tactical operations. That is the good news. However, we still could do better on what type and size intelligence organization we need to support the combatant commanders.

Much of what currently exists at these vital headquarters in Hawaii, Tampa, Miami, Colorado Springs, and Stuttgart, Germany (where U.S. European and U.S. Africa Commands are collocated), is grounded on a 1990–1991 model in which General Norman Schwarzkopf deployed forward to Saudi Arabia and essentially turned his combatant command forward headquarters into a joint task force (JTF). Arguably, we have been trying to replicate all combatant command and JTF intelligence functions at the theater level since. Our most recent iteration of transforming these organizations is the Joint Intelligence and Operations Center.

With the advent of joint training and education programs since the 1990s that emphasized joint integration, functional delegation, and technology-enabled horizontal and vertical collaboration, the need for large, theater intelligence centers of any name is diminishing. Add in the examples of Iraq and Afghanistan, with their exceptionally robust and capable intelligence structures forward and immediately available to the operational commander, and the continued support of large, theater-level organizations “in the rear” is even more suspect.

The question, then, is: What intelligence support does the 21st-century theater strategic commander really need? Clearly, we need to exercise our Title 10 and Title 50 authorities and operational responsibilities in the context of national security and national military strategies. We need to determine if the current theater intelligence structure template—fundamentally unchanged for nearly 20 years—is still relevant to supporting commanders. Are they the best we can do to provide the appropriate level and type of intelligence to commanders in the 21st century? Are they efficient and cost-effective?

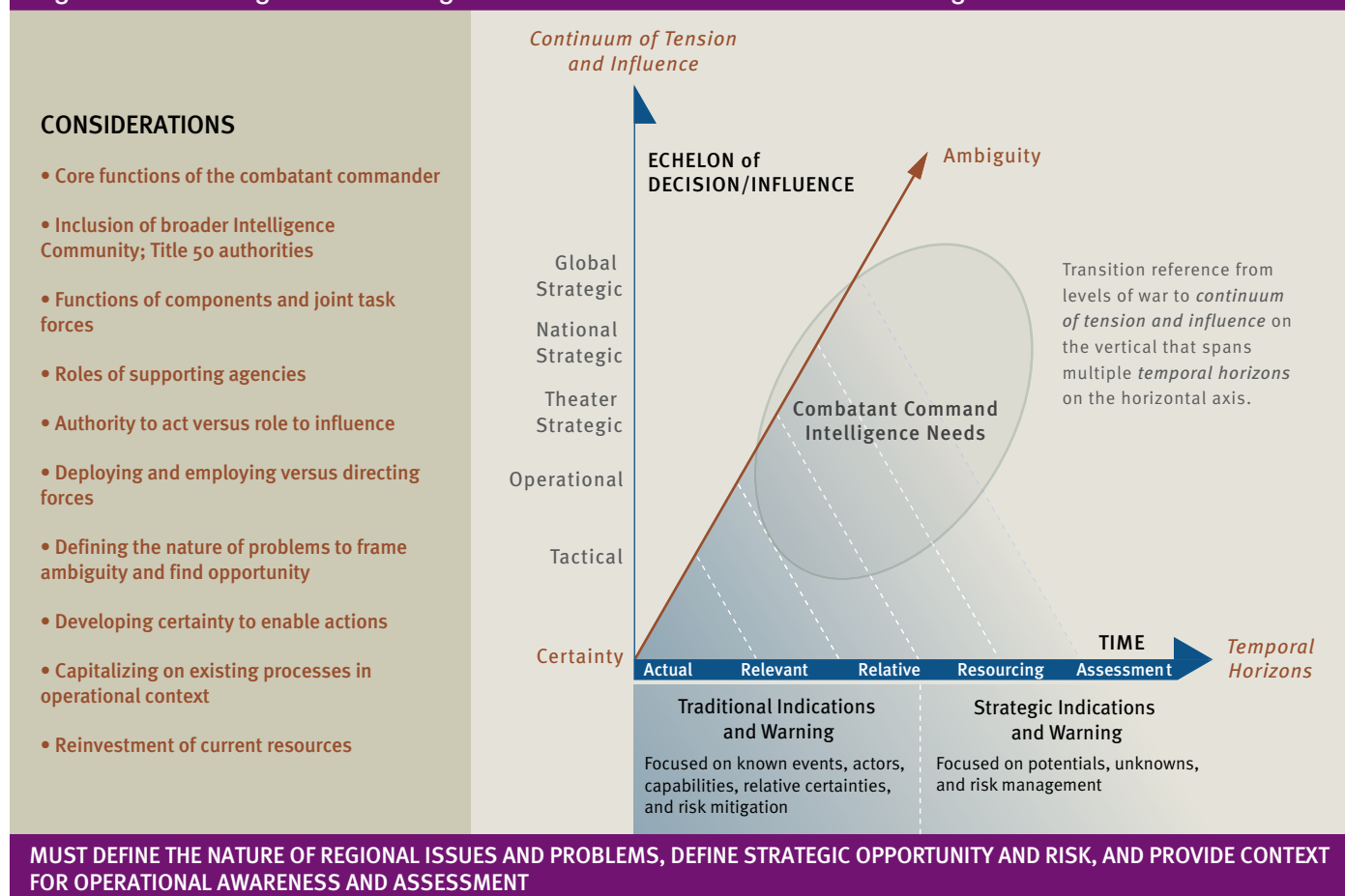
Defining the Unknown

Commanders work in the realm of strategic ambiguity. We are expected to pursue national security objectives through a host of means, often without a clear picture of all the competing interests. That is fine and is what we are paid to do.

Of the three primary Unified Command Plan responsibilities commanders hold—to develop plans for contingencies, direct operations, and perform other activities to shape the environment—the third consumes the bulk of their energies. The simply stated task of “shaping” has such broad-ranging implications that we can no longer afford to look just at the traditional aspects of military intelligence. We will engage across a host of political, sociological, cultural, informational, and military issues with leaders of all types throughout the assigned region.

These engagements are our part of a “whole-of-government” approach to national security. They demand that theater intelligence integrates a broad, strategic depth to supporting analysis in addition to the traditional order of battle and indications and warning (I&W) that have been the bread and butter of intelligence centers for more than a decade (see figure 1).¹

Figure 1. Rethinking Theater Intelligence: Nature of the Commander's Challenge



Our responsibility for preparing contingency and deliberate plans implies that we are also responsible for implementing those plans in accordance with DOD established procedures and processes. Two supporting intelligence tasks need to be supported: all-source analysis that contributes to planning as formalized in the DOD Directive for Intelligence Planning,² and an operational linkage to and alignment between the defense I&W process and the crisis and operational planning processes based on Guidance for Employment of the Force (GEF) planning and contingency tasking.

It is notable that while theater commanders typically direct operations, we generally do not conduct operations. The intent is for operations to be conducted by either the theater Service components or joint forces apportioned to us under a JTF commander. This has a significant impact on functional alignment of intelligence skills. We need to put our skills and functions where they align operationally.

We also need to look at time differently at the theater level (see figure 2). Tactical commanders can work in real time and may project themselves into future time to forecast their next engagement with an enemy force. The tactical world is one of high certainty with tangible, physical actions and results. Theater commanders' realms are not as certain, as they work with time horizons that are much farther out and impact a much broader set of factors. They and their staffs are working to affect events, people, and situations across a time continuum that may stretch for a decade.

It is clearly important for the component commanders to know where every enemy submarine, tank, and airplane is

and develop order of battle updates that determine enemy capabilities and subsequently force capabilities that need to be developed—a primary Title 10 responsibility of the Service departments and chiefs. But the theater commander's intelligence organization does not need to focus on detailed force tracking and order of battle functions.

Instead, the theater commander's interest lies in understanding the strategic reasons why forces are employed relative to U.S. national security interests. This understanding provides the rationale for commanders to develop plans and propose force and capability requirements.

Theater targeting is another function that needs to be scrutinized for potential restructuring/realignment. We must think in terms of theater versus operational targeting, then again in terms of national strategic versus theater strategic targeting, to determine the best place to apply intelligence human resources. We need a clear relationship between targeting skills and the level of command that is actually going to find, fix, and affect the target. Thus, we at a theater command may find minimal need for targeteers; instead, we should work to create a resource to meet a significant need at commands such as U.S. Strategic Command and U.S. Special Operations Command, or at theater functional and component commands and JTFs.

Exploitation is another area we should rethink. The National Cryptologic Representative (NCR) model is generally working well. With a few embedded leaders, the NCR can garner the support of thousands for our employed forces forward. Are we willing to apply the model to other disciplines and functions?

The last piece is interagency cooperation. With the broadening aperture we use to see and understand our regions, we need to rethink and fully empower the concept of reachback. The concept of reaching out and leveraging resources external to DOD needs to become inherent and institutionalized for theater intelligence. Whatever our theater intelligence organization evolves into, it has to be agile, integrate into the Nation's Intelligence Community, provide our people the best professional opportunities for growth, and have the capacity to expand and contract quickly to meet demands within a theater or in support of others.

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Defining What We Need

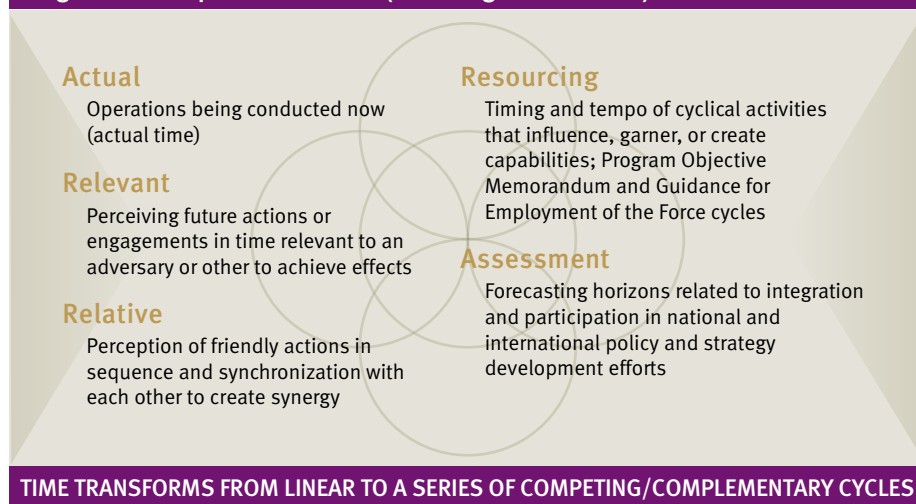
Conflict in the 21st century will demand more intelligence capabilities at lower echelons of command than ever before. Pervasive intelligence support across the force is critical and places intensive strain on our capacities. The voracious consumption and production of tactical and operational intelligence are unprecedented. Sustaining the manpower that represents realized intelligence capabilities forward at all levels is a must.

Manpower capacity must be adequate to support what is needed on a "normal" basis and programmed for expansion in crisis. Investing in the information technology and physical infrastructure for crisis operations is critical to that planning. However, the luxury of maintaining any additional crisis manpower on hand is no longer feasible.

I&W processes are critical to effectively forecasting when to transition from a steady-state to a crisis posture. The I&W process must be effectively operationalized. This will only work with education and full integration of I&W and operational processes—not the absorption of one by the other, but *full integration*.

Critical intelligence functions are more effective when they are focused on supporting units that will conduct operations or affect an action. Planning groups that consist of components, designated JTF staffs, and supporting

Figure 2. Temporal Horizons (Thinking about Time)





GEN Norman Schwarzkopf, USA, commander in chief, U.S. Central Command, visits troops who took part in Operation Desert Storm, 1992

DOD (Dean Wagner)

agencies can bring in the expertise to build joint targeting/effects lists. This allows our theater staffs to concentrate on development of targeting guidance and policy. Accordingly, planning skills will be more valuable than targeting skills at the theater level. This implies that theater components and combat support agencies (CSAs) will provide targeting expertise to our planning groups as they work.

The current analytic skill set does not encompass all the requirements we have based on National Security Strategy objectives. The transnational nature of 21st-century threats, such as terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, pandemic disease, and human and narco-trafficking, demands that our intelligence professionals and organizations be networked to garner a broader set of skills and competencies. Reaching out is not optional, and integrating the Director of National Intelligence (DNI) representative to support the theater intelligence effort is pivotal.

Theater intelligence infrastructure development and maintenance, partner nation capacity-building, and sensitive intelligence activities will continue. As we rethink our theaters, the DNI and Intelligence Community as a whole will welcome some of the opportunities we present. We have to make sure our skills and capabilities are articulated in clear and relevant terms to the rest of the community.

Options

There are options we can pursue as we rethink theater intelligence. Although any viable option will get the job done, some will incur more risk than others. The key will be

to balance current demands against future requirements adequately to allow forecasted, managed, and timely expansion and contraction of organizations at all levels.

We can continue onward essentially “as is,” with periodic shuffling of the work force between commanders and agencies based on the best argument layered on current priorities. This weights main efforts but keeps large portions of the overall Intelligence Community capacity locked into current fights and creates risk to the theater’s future shaping and engagement efforts.

We can reshape based on “getting rid of the spare tire” (see figure 3). This option keeps specific theater I&W, collection management, and enhanced analytic skills at the theater command level. Combat support agencies would still provide embedded expertise to draw products forward into the combatant command analytic shops as required, much like the National Cryptologic Representative model currently employed by our theater commander’s staffs.

Targeting, order of battle, battle tracking, and other selected functional skills would be pushed to Service centers, theater Service and functional components, JTFs, and combat support agencies. This provides components with additional manpower to support troop rotation units and gives combat support agencies the capacity to support sustained operational theater rotational force requirements.

Nonnegotiable

There are a few nonnegotiable areas as we go about this rethinking. Certain intelligence functions have to be retained at the

theater level; however, that does not necessarily mean they have to stay where they are within the theater command. For instance, there is still a requirement for a viable, robust I&W mechanism to monitor the theater and forecast decision and transition points, as well as opportunities. However, the mechanism can be an integrated element of the command center/theater monitoring/crisis action planning function.

Integrated strategic analysts from across the government bring the skills needed at the theater level. Our national security is not just about military threats, but also competitors who employ the full set of national instruments. Energy, transportation, commerce, and agriculture are some of the areas we need to reach out to.

Intelligence campaign planning and programmatic integration and oversight are critical at the theater level. We have to make sure that we translate our understanding of why things are happening into realistic

Figure 3. Getting Rid of the “Spare Tire”

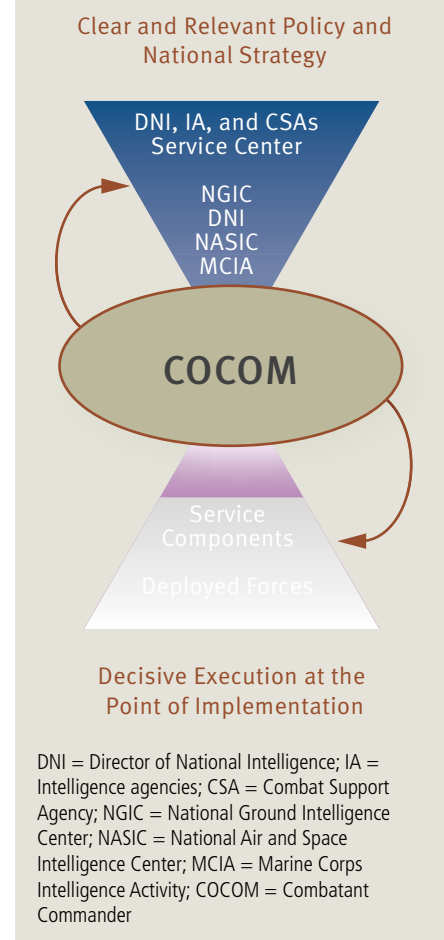
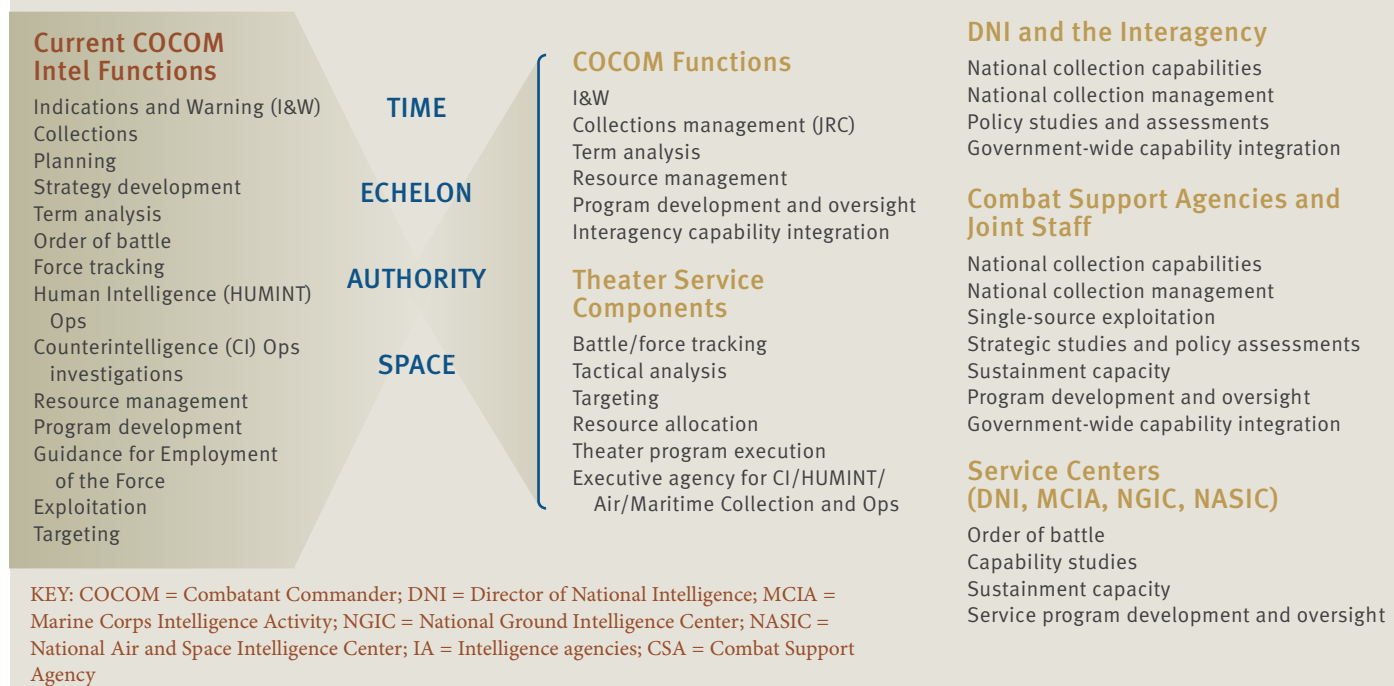


Figure 4. Rethinking Theater Intelligence: Reinvesting Resources



requirements that can shape the future force and drive adjustments to our strategic posture.

Weighing the Options

Looking at essentially a corporate restructuring, we have to consider the benefits and risks:

- Core functions retained at the theater command level must be relevant to managing the challenges at the theater strategic level, identifying opportunities to adroitly engage at the national strategic level, and providing direction to the operational level efforts.

- Inclusion of the broader Intelligence Community is critical to understanding how national resources and capabilities can be leveraged, both in our favor and against us. The issues of energy, economics, health, agriculture, and commerce increasingly are being used as the national instruments of choice by competitors.

- With continued seasoning of the force, our components and JTFs are becoming exceptionally skilled at using capabilities that only existed at theater level or in the special operations forces 10 years ago. They are equally experience- and technology-enabled, and we should empower them with the capabilities that shorten their operational and tactical sensor-actor linkage while unencumbering our theater effort.

- The roles of our supporting agencies as they relate to responding to theater require-

ments will evolve. In particular, the command and control/supporting-supported relationships will need to be redefined.

- Authority to act versus role to influence is always a consideration and will drive the type and scope of intelligence production. Experience and education will be key aspects for defining the skill requirements needed

authority to act versus role to influence will drive intelligence production

at the theater: planners and general military intelligence, interagency, and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance managers will be the four cornerstones. This will be augmented with the right level of process management and oversight.

- Deploying and employing versus conducting operations defines where critical operational and tactical intelligence skills such as time-sensitive targeting support and exploitation are needed.

Risk has to be managed. As our people learn new approaches to their jobs, and our organizations redefine their roles and functional boundaries, there is potential for processes to develop holes, or for functions to “fall off the moving cart” as they transfer

from one organization to another. Care must be taken. Consequences of failure are high.

Where We Might Go

What might this look like? A likely scenario is small, agile, adaptive intelligence organizations led by innovative thinkers who exercise the authorities to focus on and define strategic problem sets—think of them as intelligence “special operators” attached in small groups directly to theater commanders (see figure 4). They then reach back as needed to pull product to the commander’s level.

This will also require highly disciplined processes and procedures to fully exploit *all* theater staff capabilities and capacities found in our headquarters, as well as among our components and assigned forces, and clearly defined support relationships of the department’s CSAs and DNI support. Hard thinking and analysis will be crucial, but the potential payoff in efficiency and quality of support is high. **JFQ**

NOTES

¹ Scott Corrigan, “Setting Conditions through Intelligence Operations,” briefing slides with scripted commentary, Pinnacle: “Joint Operations Module,” Joint Warfighting Center, Suffolk, VA, August 4, 2009.

² Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Memorandum 3314.01, “Intelligence Planning,” Washington, DC, February 28, 2008.